

Of Children's Bearing the Iniquities of their Fathers.

²
A
S E R M O N

Preach'd before the Honourable

H O U S E of P E E R S

I N T H E

Abbey-Church at Westminster,

On Monday, January the 31st, 1708.

Being the Day appointed to be kept as the
Day of the M A R T Y R D O M of the
Blessed King C H A R L E S the First.

By O F S P R I N G, Lord Bishop of E X O N.

L A M E N T. V. 7.

*Our Fathers have sinned, and are not, and we
have born their Iniquities.*

L O N D O N,

Printed by D. B. for the benefit of the Poor.
Price One Penny.

Die Martis 1^o Februarij, 1708.

IT is Ordered by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, in Parliament Assembled, That the Thanks of this House shall be, and they are hereby Given to the Lord Bishop of *Exeter*, for his Sermon Preached before this House Yesterday, in the *Abbey-Church* at *Westminster*; And is hereby Desired to Print and Publish the same.

Matth. Johnson,
Cl^r Parliamentor'

LAMENT. V. 7. *Our Fathers have sinned, and are not, and we have born their Iniquities.*

THE Title of this Book, call'd *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*, declares its Author; and the Subject or Matter of it sufficiently shews upon what Occasion it was written; viz. Either the Death of *Josiah*, or the Destruction of *Jerusalem*; or both.

For that it was written upon Occasion of *Josiah's* Death, is probably argu'd from what we read in 2 Chron. xxxv. 25. *And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and all the Singing Men and Singing Women spake of Josiah in their Lamentations to this Day, and made them an Ordinance in Israel; and behold they are written in the Lamentations.*

But that it was written upon Occasion of the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the Captivity in *Babylon*, is, I think, still more probably argued from that Preface or Introduction to this Book, which (tho' not in the *Hebrew*) we meet with in the *Greek Translation* thereof by the *Seventy*, in these Words; *And it came to pass, that after Israel was carried Captive, and Jerusalem destroy'd, Jeremiah sat down weeping; and lamented, or utter'd forth, this Lamentation upon Jerusalem, and said; "How doth the City sit sorrowful, &c.*

But it may be, and indeed I think it the most probable Opinion of all, that the Book (as it now is) was written upon both these Occasions; I mean, That upon the Death of good King *Josiah*, which happen'd some Years before the Captivity, *Jeremiah* did lament for him, in some such Words as we now meet with in this Book; But that afterwards, upon the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the carrying of the People Captive into *Babylon*, he review'd his former Mournful Song, and added thereto, and intermingled therewith some other Passages that were more peculiarly expressive of those sad Calamities.

The Book it self consists of two Principal Parts; The first, contain'd in the four first Chapters, is chiefly a sorrowful Description of the miserable Condition of the *Jews*, by the Loss of such an excellent King, by the Ruin and Destruction of their City and Kingdom, and by their own Slavery in *Babylon*. The other Part, comprehended in this 5th Chapter, is a Prayer to God for Deliverance from that sore Affliction which they were then under; wherein to move God to Compassion, their sad and miserable State is again set forth, and humbly represented to him.

The Words I am now to discourse of are a Part of this Prayer. And, as such, they may be taken and understood three Ways.

I. As a simple Affirmation of a Matter of Fact; *Our Fathers have sinned and are not, and we have born their Iniquity.*

II. As a Complaint, or an Expostulation with God about it; as if
it

it had been said; *Why is this; or what Justice or Reason is there in it, that we should be punish'd for our Father's Sins?* Or,

III. Lastly; As a Petition to God, that it might be so no longer, but that this Entail of Punishment might now be cut off.

And accordingly, in my Discourse on the Words, I shall do these three things.

1. I shall prove the Matter of Fact; *Viz.* That God does sometimes make the Children bear the Sins of the Fathers.

2. I shall shew that this Method of God's dealing with sinful Men is not to be complain'd of as unjust. And

3. Lastly; I shall shew, that it is nevertheless proper Matter of Petition or Prayer to God that he would be pleas'd to cut of this Entail of Punishment, and *not Remember against us the Iniquities of our Father's.*

And in the Handling of each of these Heads, I shall have a Particular Respect to that which is the Occasion of this Day's Humiliation and Fasting.

I. I shall prove the matter of Fact; *Viz.* That God does sometimes make the Children bear the the Sins of the Fathers. *Our Father have sinned——— and we have born their Iniquities.*

And for the Proof of this we should need to look no farther then to that very Case which the Text refers to. *Viz.* the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the Captivity of the *Jews* in *Babylon*; which came not to pass till about threescore Years, or more, after that wicked Part of *Manasseh's* Reign, *2 King. xxiii. 26, 27.* whereby God hath been proyok'd, and upon which he hath determin'd, to inflict this heavy Judgment upon them.

But this is not the only Instance of this Kind that the Scripture furnishes us with. For for the Idolatry of *Ahab*, *2 Kings x. 11.* his whole Famaily was cut off; for the Sin of *Saul* in Killing the *Gibeonites*, *2 Sam. xxi. 1.* the Kingdom after his Death was Plagued with three Years Famine, Year after Year, in the Reign of *David*; *V 9. 14.* and the same Sin was again most severely punished in *Saul's* own Family, when it could not be expiated, nor the Plague that was thereby occasioned be removed, but by the Hanging up of Seven of his Issue. And was for the Sin of *Eli* (*1 Sam. ii. 33.*) and his Sons that his whole Posterity was depriv'd of the Priesthood, and that all the Increase of his House died in the Flower of their Age.

And what need I add more? for we may see with our own Eyes a standing Example of this in the whole Nation of the *Jews*, a People once belov'd by God, and highly favour'd above all Nations: But they, when they crucified the Lord of Life and Glory, said, *his Blood be on us, and on our Children*; (*Matth. xxvii. 25.*) And so it has been ever since: For from that Time to this, they have never been in such a flourishing Condition as before. It was not many Years after that their City and Temple and Common wealth were

the God was graciously pleas'd not then to Punish us so much as to destroy'd, and their whole Nation disperst; ever since which they have wander'd about the World as Vagabonds, every where hated and despis'd, and in some Places and Ages most miserably butcher'd and slaughter'd; so that if one should add together the prodigious Numbers of them, that have been Massacred in several Ages and Countries, chiefly in and soon after, the Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem, one would think it hardly possible any of them should be remaining; yet still they do remain, and in great Numbers too, some of them in almost every Country in the World, and every where unmix'd with other People, to be, as it were, living Monuments of God's heavy Displeasure.

Or, we may if we will, see still a greater Example of this Entail of Punishment in our selves; I mean in the whole Race of Mankind; upon all whom there is (as we see and feel by our own sad Experience) entail'd a Curse, and a Disease, for the Transgression of our first Parents; For 'tis to that we all now owe our present Misery and Mortality, *By one Man Sin entred into the World, and Death by Sin; and so Death pass'd upon all Men.* (Rom. v. 12.)

(And Lastly, if we reflect upon that which is the occasion of our now humbling our selves before God, viz. the barbarous Murder of King CHARLES the First of Blessed Memory, by his own Subjects, the People of this Land, and the Rebellion which preceeded it, I believe we may think that we also, have some Reason to say with the Jews in the Text, *Our Fathers have sinned, and are not, and we have born their Iniquities*; For well may those Evils and Calamities be thought to be sent upon the Nation for that Sin, which have been in natural Consequence the Fruits of it.

And such were, plainly, those many Years of Misery, of Anarchy or Tyranny, and of great Confusion, which immediately follow'd; and which continued untill the Happy Restoration of King Charles the Second: During which Time we might have taken up and applyed to our selves a considerable Part of this Book of the Lamentations; We might have said, as the Prophet here does; *How hath the Lord afflicted Zion for the Multitude of her Transgressions?* Chap. i. V. 6. *From the Daughter of Zion all her Beauty is departed; Her Princes are become like Harts that find no Pasture; they are gone without Strength before the Pursuer.* Chap. ii. V. 1. *How hath the Lord cover'd the Daughter of Zion with a Cloud in his Anger, and cast down from Heaven the Earth the Beauty of Israel, and remembred not his Footstool the Day of his Anger?* Her King, and her Princes were among the Gentiles; The Law was no more; the Prophets also found no vision from the Lord. (v. 9.) The Elders sat upon the Ground and kept silence, they cast Dust upon their Heads, and cover'd themselves with Sackcloth. (v. 10.) All they that went by clapp'd their Hands at her; they hiss'd and wagged their Head, saying; *Is this the City that Men call'd the Perfection of Beauty, the Joy of the whole Earth?* (v. 15.) All her Enemies also open'd their Mouth against her, and said, *We have swal-*

found, we have seen it. (v. 16.) The Priest and the Prophets were slain in the Sanctuary of the Lord; (v. 20.) The young and the old lay on the Ground in the Streets; the Virgins and the Young Men fell by the Sword (v. 21.) They that were brought up in Scarlet did embrace Dunghills. (Ch. iv. V. 5.) The Adversary and the Enemy entred into the Gates of Jerusalem; (v. 12.) they shed the Blood of the Just in the midst of her. (v. 13.) Also the Breath of our Nostrils, the Anointed of the Lord was taken in their Pits; of whom we said, under this shadow we shall be safe. (v. 20.) Then was our Inheritance turned to Strangers, and our Aliens; (Ch. v. V. 2.) We drank our Water for Money, and our Wood was sold unto us. (v. 4.) Our Necks were under Persecution; we labour'd and had no rest. (v. 5.) Servants also did rule over us; and there was none to deliver us out of their Hand. (v. 8.)

But from their Hand (God be thank'd) we have now for many Years been deliver'd; By the Wonderful and most Providential Restoration of King CHARLES the Second to his just Rights, we also were restored to our ancient Government both in Church and State, and to the publick and free Possession of the true Religion, together with our former Peace and Prosperity.

And yet, for all this, I doubt I may truly say, that we do even still in some Measure bear that Iniquity of our Fathers which we this Day desire to be humble for.

For if we look back to the Times past, it will be easy to discern, that even the War which we are at this time engag'd in, had its first Ground in the Wickedness of this Day. For when the Father was cut off, and his Throne and Power usurp'd, the young Princes were forc'd to wander where they could find a Place: And there, in the Court of a Neighbouring King, they might easily learn (there one of them we are too sure did learn) Customs and Manners, both in Government and Religion, clearly different from those which had been here receiv'd and establish'd. And such Diligence (we well remember) was us'd, and such Progress made, during a short Reign of less than Four Years, in endeavouring to bring in the same Customs and Manners among us, that if that Reign had continued much longer, we must (nnavoidably, to all Appearance) have been brought under very great Bondage, both Spiritual and Temporal. But it pleas'd God of his Goodness to cut short those Days, so that our Enemies had not Time enough to accomplish their wicked Designs; It pleas'd him, I say, by a wonderful Deliverance, such as could not have been look'd for, to preserve to us then our Rights, Properties and Religion; upon which we might have said, in the Words of the Psalmist, *Our Soul is escaped as a Bird out of the Snare of the Fowler; the Snare is broken, and we are delivered.* But how-

ever

ver, tho' God was graciously pleas'd not then to Punish us so much as he seem'd to threaten he would do, and as we were afraid he would have done; he was not so far reconcil'd to us as to forgive our Sin wholly, and suffer us to go altogether unpunish'd; but when he removed one Judgment sent another in its Room So that tho' it may (I hope truly) be said, that we are now made whole of that Disease, of which before we were sick almost to Death; it must nevertheless be granted, that even the Remedy by which we were cured, and by the Use whereof we are still preserv'd in health, tho' not so bad as the Disease; yet has been, and still is, very painful and afflicting. For there was no way to keep out Popery and Slavery then pressing hard upon us, but by engaging in War with a potent Enemy, whose Strength, now, after so many Years Experience as we have had of it, we have learn'd, I suppose, not to despise.

For as much therefore as this tedious and expensive War, which we have been now for many Years engag'd in, and of which God knows when we shall see an End, was when it was first undertaken, and still is, the necessary Remedy of those much worse Evils that we were before in Fear, and indeed indeed in very great Danger of; and forasmuch as the great Danger we were in of those Evils was directly and naturally occasion'd by the young Princes being sent abroad to wander in foreign Countries, by those who had first Rebelled against and Murdered the Father, and then Seized upon his and their Inheritance; I think I may truly say, that tho' *our Fathers who sinned are not*; yet *we*, in this heavy Judgment of God still lying upon us, do to this Day, *bear their Iniquities*; and how much longer we shall do so under this, or some other Judgment, God only knows.

But, I observ'd before that these Words might be understood, not only as affirming a Matter of Fact, that thus it is, but also as implying a Complaint, or an Expostulation with God about it; *Our Fathers have sinned, and we have born their Iniquities*; as if it had been said, *Why is this? Or what Justice or Reason is there in it, that we should bear the Iniquities of our Fathers that sinned? Why is it, that when they are dead and gone out of the World, who did the Sin; We, who being not then born, could not; We, who if we had been then Living, would not have consented to, nor been Partakers in their Wickedness, could be Punished for it.* And therefore I propounded in the Second Place, and to that I now proceed.

II. To shew that this Method of God's dealing with sinful Men is not to be complain'd of as Unjust. And this I hope will sufficiently appear, if these following things be consider'd.

1. That the Temporal Evils, by which the Sins of the Fathers are punish'd in their Children, are many times, no other than the natural and necessary Effects of those Sins which the Fathers were guilty of.

This I have shewn to be in great Measure true as to those Evils which we of this Nation have felt, and do still feel, in Punishment (as we may well think) of the Sin that was committed as on this Day by our Fathers, in the barbarous Murder of the Lord's Anointed.

And the same is plainly true in many other Instances.

For thus the Prodigal wastes away, in Rioting, Excess or Gaming that Portion of Worldly Goods which was left him by his careful Ancestors, or neglects those Opportunities of improving his Stock which the good Providence of God afforded him; and by this means comes to Beggary, He and his Children after him: But how can it otherwise be, unless God should every day work Miracles, and multiply Men's Treasure (as once he did the poor *Widow's Oyl*) on purpose to maintain them in their Luxury, Extravagance or Sloth?

And so likewise the Intemperate and Unclean Person fills his Body with foul Humours, and contracts loathsome Diseases, and these of course descend to those that derive their Bodies from him: And it must needs be so, unless God should interpose with his Almighty Power, to put a stop to the natural Effects of our Folly and Madness. This indeed he might do, if he pleas'd; but that he should do so can with no Reason be expected. And when it thus happens, and the Father lives to see it, this must needs be a sore Affliction and Punishment to him; but to the Children it is only a Misfortune, and on God's Part it is only a Permission; who can't therefore be charged with Injustice for suffering things to take their natural Course.

2. It may be consider'd, that the Temporal Evils and Calamities wherewith God punishes the Sins of the Fathers in their Children are for the most part, only Privations of those Mercies with which He had freely bestow'd upon them once; Or Denials of such Favours as he might (if he had pleas'd) have conferr'd upon them, but was under no Obligation, in Justice, to grant, altho' they had been descended from the most vertuous Parents. Or, in other Words, The Children of wicked Parents are not so happy and prosperous as God could have made them, if he would: Their Punishment is commonly no more than this, that God does not shew them such Favour, as he does (it may be) shew to some others, but is not oblig'd to shew to any. And what Injustice is there in this? May not

he do what he will with his own? May not he have Mercy on whom he will have Mercy, and shew Favour to whom he pleases?

Thus it was in the Case of *Reboboam*, from whom God was pleased to suffer Ten Tribes to revolt, for the Sin and Idolatry of his Father *Solomon*: But he needed not to have left him one Tribe; to reign over one Tribe was more than he or his Father either, could have challeng'd of God as a Due; God did him no wrong therefore in giving him no more than one Tribe: And we can't say that he did, without denying to God, the Sovereign Lord and Proprietor of all things, that Power and Liberty which we our selves claim of bestowing our free and unmerited Favours on whom we will. For what Man is there who having a Place or Gift to bestow, will not chuse to bestow it rather on One whose Father was his Friend, than on One whose Father was his Enemy? And who can think him to blame for so doing? If we therefore, who are only Stewards of those things we possess, and pretend to give away, may do thus, certainly God, the true Owner and Proprietor of all things may do the same, without the least Imputation of Injustice.

And such have been the Calamities which have befallen this Nation, since the Perpetration of that horrid Wickedness which we this Day lament; those Evils, I mean more especially, which have in Natural Consequence been produced or occasion'd thereby; Very grievous Calamities indeed they have been in themselves, but yet they have been rather Denials or Privations of Good, than positive Inflictions of Evil. For tho' we suffer'd for several Years after the Commission of this great Wickedness, the manifold Inconveniences both of Anarchy and Tyranny; and have never since been so well settled, either in Government or Religion, as we were before; yet after all that is come upon us, the most that can be said is, that we have not been so happy a Nation as we might have been, and probably should have been, had not the Guilt of that Royal and Innocent Blood that was as this Day shed, laid upon us; But still (God be thanked) we have been more Happy than most of our Neighbour-Nations; we have in the main enjoy'd a much greater Measure of Liberty and Peace, of Plenty and Prosperity than most of them have done. So that tho' we have been always, like the *Israelites* of old, Murmuring and Complaining; and like *Solomon's Fool*, Crying out of the badness of the Times, and Enquiring why the former Days were better than these; yet I believe, that if they who have been the most full of Complaints, had when they were first Born into the World, been endued with a Foresight of all that has since happen'd in the World, and it had then been put to their Choice to have liv'd in what Part of the World they had pleas'd, it would have puzzled them

them to find out any Country in the whole Earth, wherein they could rather have cholen to have liv'd ; or, wherein if they had liv'd, they would have suffer'd fewer Difficulties, or lesser Inconveniences, or have enjoy'd a greater Measure of Ease, Safety, Plenty and Prosperity, than they have done here. So that tho' it may be true, and I think it probable that it is so, that we have in our Age born in some Measure the Iniquities of our Fathers ; yet upon the whole, we have no reason to be discontented with our Lot, or to complain as if we were hardly dealt with. But,

3. In order to the farther clearing this Method of the Divine Providence from the least Imputation of Injustice, it may be consider'd that God has a Sovereign and Uncontroulable Dominion over all our Persons as well as over our Possessions ; that we our selves are his Goods, as well as any of those things are which we, by his Bounty do enjoy ; For 'twas He that made us, as well as all other things ; And he might not have created us at all ; or he might have made us Birds, or Beasts, or Fishes ; Monsters, or Naturals ; and if he had not done so, we could not have complain'd. For, as the *Apostle* argues, *Rom. ix. 12. Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus ? Hath not the Potter Power over the Clay, of the same Lump to make one Vessel unto Honour, and another unto Dishonour ?*

He therefore being our Sovereign Lord, to whom we are indebted for all we have, and to whose meer Grace and Goodness it is entirely owing that we ourselves have any Being at all : He may in Right of that absolute Dominion which he has over us as our Creator, without any Injustice, put us into whatever Condition he pleases, or alter it for the worse whenever he will, without assigning any other Cause or Reason for his so doing, but his own Pleasure only. Nay, he may if he will wholly take away that Life and Being which he freely gave us, whenever he lists ; when we are but a Month, or but a Day old, as well as when we have lived here threescore or fourscore Years ; And in all this he does us no Wrong, because it was a free and unmerited Favour that we ever liv'd at all, and nothing can oblige him to continue to us an undeserved Favour, unless he pleases, or for a longer time than he sees good.

In short ; whatever Condition God is pleas'd to put any of his Creatures into, if it be but better than Non existence, or not being at all, that he may put any of his Creatures into, tho' they be perfectly innocent, without doing them any Wrong : And therefore it can be no Injustice in God to take Occasion from the Sins of our Fathers or Progenitors, to deal so by us as he might have done, tho' neither they nor we had sinned. For he may certainly, without Injustice

...in they had li-
...conve-
...Pien-
...may be
...ur Age
...on the
...or to
...ne Pro-
...sider'd
...all our
...are his
...Bounty
...things;
...made us
...he had
...fle ar-
...med it,
...e Clay,
...er unto
...are in-
...ness it
...e may
...s our
...on he
...assign-
...Plea-
...se and
...ve are
...d here
...rong,
...at all,
...avour,
...of his
...being
...e per-
...ore it
...f our
...e tho'
...ut In-
...justice

...ice, do that upon any Occasion which he might have, *may have*
...on no Occasion at all.

4. It may be also considered farther, that very many, if not most of the Evils and Calamities by which God punishes the Sins of the others in their Children, are such as are very great Punishments to the Parents, but are often very small Evils, nay sometimes are very great Blessings and Favours to the Children which suffer them.

For thus, The untimely Death of a hopeful Child is indeed a very great Affliction to the Parent, especially when he reflects upon it as a punishment sent by God upon him for his Sin; but 'tis a Blessing to the Child himself, who dies in the Lord, and is convey'd into Paradise out of a troublesome World, before he so much as knew the trouble of it.

And thus likewise, To a Man that has toiled and drudged all his days, endeavouring by Fraud, Oppression and Extortion, to heap together a great deal of Wealth, and to raise a Family, it must needs be a great Grief and Disappointment, to see his Wealth, all his ill-gotten Goods mouldering, wasting, or (as the *Wise Man* expresses it) *fleeing away*; so that his Children, whom he has brought up in all Delicacy and Softness, are in danger of being reduc'd to beggary, or must be forc'd to get their Living by hard Labour; but to the Children themselves, for whose sake it is that he is so much concern'd, this Dispensation of Providence may be the greatest Blessing that could befall them; and so it will be, if the Consideration hereof impresses upon their Minds a serious Sense of Religion, and helps to mortify them to this World, and puts them upon taking good Courses, and makes them to beware of splitting themselves upon the same Rock.

And so likewise, if it be supposed (as I do indeed suppose) that we have born, and do still bear, the Iniquities of our Fathers, who sinned, and are not; particularly that great Iniquity which was acted as upon this Day, the Barbarous Murder of an Excellent Prince, together with the other Wickednesses that were preparatory thereto; there may be, however, a great deal of Goodness, as well as Justice, in this Dispensation of Providence. For to them who had a Hand in this Sin, if they had any Affection at all to their Native Country, or any Care and Concern about Posterity, it could not but be an Affliction to see what desolation they had, by this Sin, and the Preparations to it, brought upon their Country; to behold what Disorder and Confusion they had put every thing into, and to contemplate the Miseries which were thereby entail'd upon their Posterity: But now to us their Children, even those Evils that we have suffered, do yet suffer, upon that Account, may in Consequence, be a Blessing. And they will be, if we thereby shall be warn'd to avoid those Sins which have brought down such Miseries upon us; So they will be, if thereby shall be taught to bear steady Loyalty to our Sovereign, to yield due Obedience to the Laws, to conform regularly to that excellent Worship, which by God's Providence has been since restor'd, and is now established among us; to be humble, contented, and orderly, in our several Stations; to *study to be quiet, and to do our own Business*

ness, and to seek and endeavour after the things that make for Peace. If we say, shall be so happy as, by all the Evils that have befallen us, to learn their Vertues and Graces, we shall have no Reason to complain of our having suffer'd those Evils, from which we shall have reaped such great Advantage. For much better it will be for us to have born the Punishment of our Fathers Iniquity, without the Guilt of it, than it would be to incur the like Guilt ourselves (as perhaps without such Warning we should have done) altho' we might escape the Temporal Punishment thereof. Any Evil is to be reckon'd as good when it prevents or cures a greater Evil; and there's no Evil of Affliction so great as the least Evil of Sin.

In this therefore, and such like Cases, when by the Judgments of God (whether for their own or others Sins) Men are taught Righteousness, they have no Reason to complain. When the Wickedness of the Fathers is, with this good Effect visited upon their Children, tho' the Matter of the Punishment seems to light upon the Children, it is yet in Truth a Punishment only to the wicked Parents; but to the Children it is a great Blessing, and what they will have Reason to Bless God for to all Eternity. Such Punishments as this are like the Pillar of the Cloud wherewith God once conducted the Israelites through the Red-Sea, they have a double, and a very different Aspect; For, on the one side, *Viz.* that which looks towards the Parents, they are all Blackness, and Darkness, and Melancholly: They can't but be heartily concern'd at the Miseries which they have entail'd upon their Posterity, But on the other side, *Viz.* that which looks towards the Children, they are all Light and Brightness, serving to direct them in the Way they are to go, and helping them to steer in the right Course to the heavenly Canaan, the Land of Everlasting Blessedness.

Thus the Divine Justice might be vindicated in Punishing, as it sometimes does, the Sins of the Fathers in their Children, tho' it be supposed that the Children themselves have done nothing to deserve Punishment. But then I add in the fifth and last Place.

5. That whatever the Temporal Evils and Afflictions are, wherewith God is at any time pleased to punish the Sins of the Fathers in their Children, they are never more nor greater than the Children themselves do deserve to suffer merely for their own Transgressions. And therefore, they can have no Reason to think it hard that God is pleas'd to take Occasion from the Sins of their Fathers to inflict upon them those Plagues and Punishments, which otherwise perhaps he would not have inflicted; because, without Injustice, he might have laid the same upon them much sooner, and in a large Measure, only upon Account of their own Personal Guilt and Transgression.

This was certainly the Case of the Jews who were carried Captive to Babylon. They said, and perhaps truly, *Our Fathers have sinned—and we have born their Iniquity*; They said, and perhaps truly, *The Fathers have eaten sowre Grapes, and the Childrens Teeth are set on Edge*; but they needed not to have look'd further for a Reason of all the Calamities that had befallen them, than to themselves only. They had had indeed a good King, who after the wicked Reign of Manasseh, by which the People had been exceedingly corrupted, had shewn them an excellent Pattern, and had earnestly endeavour'd to reform the State of things; but it does not appear by the History that the People were at all reform'd by his Care. And therefore the Prophet Ezekiel sharply reproves them, when they were in the Captivity in Babylon, for laying the Blame of the Bondage, which they then endur'd only upon the Transgression of their Fathers in the Reign of Manasseh, as if they themselves had done nothing at all to deserve it. Ezek. xviii. 2. *What mean ye, that ye use this Proverb concerning the Land of Israel, saying, the Fathers have eaten sowre Grapes, and the Childrens Teeth are set on Edge?* He does not say, that there was not then, nor ever had been

then any Ground in Fact for that Proverbial Speech; but only, asks the Question, *What mean ye to use this Proverb?* In which Words it is not imply'd, that the Proverb was never true, but only that they in particular had no Reason to use it; that is, that they had done enough themselves to deserve all they suffer'd, and a great deal more, and so should not have needed, in Excuse as it were of themselves, to have laid all the Blame upon their Fathers. And therefore it follows in the next Verse, *As I live, saith the Lord, ye shall not have Occasion any more to use this Proverb in Israel.* Which Words are not (as I suppose) to be understood, as if the Proverb might never be used; that is, as if God never had, nor never would inflict Temporal Evils upon Children for the Sins of the Fathers; for he himself plainly declares the contrary, *Exod. xxxiv.* (and in more than ten Places besides) *Visiting the Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children, and upon the Childrens Children, unto the third, and unto the fourth Generation;* I have already had Occasion to mention several Examples of God's thus dealing with Men; But (the Meaning of those Words, *Ye shall not have Occasion to use this Proverb,* I take to be this,) that since they were so convicted of themselves, and stood so much in the Justification of their own Innocence; God was resolv'd to continue his Judgments upon them so long until their Eyes should be opened to see their own Guilt, and to be sensible that all the Sufferings which they had endur'd had been no more than a just Punishment upon them for their own Transgression only, *Ye shall not have Occasion to use this Proverb any more.*

And this same, I doubt, is now our Case. Very willing we are to shift off the Blame from our selves, and to say, as in the Text, *Our Fathers have sinned, and we have born their Iniquity;* And, it may be, we have; I think it probable enough that we have done so; and particularly that the Innocent Blood shed as upon this Day, has since in many Instances been reveng'd upon us: But be it so, We, however, should not need to go so far off for a Reason of all our Calamities; because, if our Eyes be but open, we may easily see a sufficient Cause of them nearer Home. This I dare say, that whoever reads the History of the Times before that Great Rebellion brake out, and compares the State of Things then with what it is now; I mean as to Matters of Religion and Morality; As to the Exercise of Piety, Justice and Sobriety, will have little Reason to think that we are better than our Fathers; He will, I fear, rather have Reason to say that we are a great deal worse; so that we need not look farther than to our selves only for a Cause of all those Evils that have befallen us, or which we have yet cause to fear. Or if what we have hitherto suffer'd has been only for the Sins of our Fathers, we have Reason to fear, that as our Wickedness is, to all Appearance, greater than theirs, so our Posterity live to see worse Times than we have done.

For then, in the Days of our Fathers, there was at least a Form of Godliness; and now there is hardly so much as that: Then the Publick Devotions were performed regularly, the Churches duly frequented, the *Pater familias* follow'd to his Parish-Church by his whole Household; Good Orders, and good Hours were then kept in Families; Children and Servants were Catechis'd and taught their Duty; and that leisure Time from Business in Evenings, which is now by too many spent in in temperate Clubs, or in the Diversions of an impudent and ungodly Theatre, was then pass'd away in innocent and friendly Conversation among Neighbours, and Family Discipline and Devotion. Then, Vice, however it might be secretly practis'd, was ashamed to be seen; there was no Prophanene

phaneness in the Streets ; None had the Confidence then to speak openly against Religion, to make a Mock at Sin, to ridicule the Holy Scriptures, to deny the Lord that bought them, to plead for Irreligion, to publish Blasphemy in Print, or to appear other than a Friend to Piety and Goodness. Nay then, the Stage it self (at least in Comparison with what it has been since) was chaste, modest and vertuous. But what the State of Things is now, in all these Respects, I shall not need to observe, we all see it, and know it full well.

And if I should say moreover that there are some still among us deeply tainted with those Principles of Sedition and Rebellion which brought about this Day's Tragedy as any of their Fathers were, and who, if they had lived in their Days, would have been as forward as the forwardest of them were in unhinging the Government, and Destroying the Church, nay, and in bringing their Sovereign to the Block ; tho' some, perhaps, would be angry at my saying this, I fear it would be only for my speaking a Truth out of Season ; And they, I believe, would be most angry with me for saying it who best know it to be a Truth.

Upon the whole then, it being so apparent that we are not better than our Fathers (I would to God I could say we are not worse) tho' it may be true, that we do in some Measure bear their Iniquities, we have yet no reason to complain ; neither have we more Occasion than the Jews in Captivity had, to use that Proverb, *The Fathers have eaten sowre Grapes, and the Childrens Teeth are set on Edge* : But rather I'm sure we may well use those Words of the Prophet Ezra applying them to our selves, and say ; *After all that is come upon us, for our evil Deeds, and for our great Trespasse, our God has punished us less than our Iniquities deserve* ; (Ezra ix. 13.) and he would have done so, altho' he had not granted us any of those wonderful Deliverances which he has been pleas'd in our great Extremities to vouchsafe unto us.

But whether we now have Reason to use that Proverb or not, it is certain, that it may sometimes be used ; it is certain, that God does sometimes visit the Sin of the Fathers upon the Children. And therefore, tho' when this happens, it is not (as I have shewen) to be complain'd of ; yet we may at any time, very reasonably and piously desire of God, that it may not so happen to us. And this was the Third and last Point I propounded to speak to ; *Viz*;

III. To shew that it is a proper Matter of Petition or Prayer to God, that he would be pleas'd to cut off this Entail of Punishment, and not make us bear the Iniquities of our Fathers.

In this Sense, I observed before, the Words of the Text, consider'd as Part of a Prayer to God, may be understood, *viz.* as urging a Reason to move God to have Compassion upon his People in Captivity : *Our Fathers have sinned, and we have born their Iniquities* : As if it had been said ; *Hitherto we have born them, but let it be so now now no longer ; Let thy Justice be satisfied with that Vengeance which thou hast already taken, in the Miseries which our Fathers endured in their own Persons, and which they lived to see brought upon us their Children by their*

their Means; Now therefore, since they are not, since they, being gone out of this World, are no longer sensibly of those Evils which we suffer in it; we humbly Pray thee, that thou would'st have Pity upon us their Children, and not afflict us any longer upon their Account; 'Tis time, we hope, now, that thou should'st make a new Trial of us, and see if we will not behave our selves better than our Fathers did.

And there are other Examples in Scripture of Prayer, or Petition of this Kind: *Psalm. cvi. 6. We have sinned with our Fathers, says the Psalmist, we have committed Iniquity, we have done wickedly; Our Fathers understood not thy Wonders in Egypt, and so on.* What could they mean by thus confessing the Sins of their Fathers, but to Deprecate the Evils whereby those Sins had deserv'd to be punished in their Posterity?

It is therefore an unreasonable Exception which some have made to that Petition in our Litany, *Remember nor Lord our Offences, nor the Offences of our Forefathers;* as if (for that's what they would make the World believe of us) we here comply'd with the *Papists*, in Praying for the Dead: But no such Matter, we do not herein Pray for the Dead, for those who (as the Text expresses it) are not; we only Pray for our selves who are alive, that we may not bear their Iniquities. And what Petition can be better grounded and warranted than this is, when we are so plainly told in several Places of Scripture, that God does *visit the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children?*

And as causeless is their Anger who are displeased with us for Keeping this Day, as a Day of Solemn Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer, on which, to the Dishonour of our Nation, and the Reproach of the Reformed Religion, the Blessed King Charles the First was barbarously Murthered by his own Subjects, the People of this Land; and that too in the most shameful Manner, Try'd in a pretended High Court of Justice, and by them Sentenced to be Executed as a Malefactor.

But why are they angry with us for Keeping this Day? Is it because they do not like that a Day of Fasting should be kept upon such an Occasion? Then, it seems, they approve of the Fact; they think it was well done; they think it was nothing not to be ashamed or repented of. But who can stretch forth his Hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless? *1 Sam. xxvi. 9.* If then we will take the Judgment of the Scripture before theirs, it was a Sin, and a great one too; and, if ever any single Act was such, it was a National Sin; for 'twas done by them that had then usurp'd the Supreme Authority; and there was also too general a Consent of the People to it; there is good Reason therefore that the whole Nation should be humbled and sorrowful for it, and with one Voice and Cry deprecate the Punishment thereof.

But it is a long while ago, they say, since this was done; 'tis fit therefore now that the Day should be laid aside; If it was a Sin, 'twas not however our Sin, nor the Sin of our Fathers, and they are not; what matters it then to us what they did? They have answer'd for it to God, and receiv'd their own Doom; and why should we, who had no Hand at all in the thing, take the Guilt of it upon our selves?

But if our Fathers, who sinned, are not, we may still bear their Iniquities; It is expressly said in Scripture, that God *visits the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children even to the third and fourth Generation.* If then we are still liable to the Divine Judgments upon that Account, I think there is Reason good that we should still continue to Pray, as we have hitherto done, that these Judgments may not fall us; but that God will be reconciled to the Land; and when he makes Inquisition for Blood, not lay the Guilt of this innocent Blood to the Charge of the People of this Land, nor ever require it of us on our Posterity. And 'twill be too soon to be off Praying thus; nay, 'twill (I think) be too soon so much as to enter in any Debate about it, until (at least) the Term of this express Divine Threatning shall be expir'd, that is, until the third and fourth Generation shall be past and

and gone, and *the Children, and the Childrens Children* shall *be gathered unto* their Fathers.

And more than this needs not, I hope, be said upon this Point to those who, by their Presence in this Place, upon this Occasion, do sufficiently shew their Approbation of the Keeping of this Day, and that they think there is but too great Reason for it. For I will not suppose it possible that any of you have been now mocking of God, while you have seem'd to be Praying to him.

I only add therefore, that to make the Prayers we have now put up to God availing, we must forsake our Sins, as well as confess them. As therefore we have been now Confessing that they were *the Crying Sins of this Nation that brought down this heavy Judgment upon us*; so let us be careful that we *sin no more* lest a worse thing come unto us; And as we have been Praying that God would *not lay it to our Charge the Guilt of that innocent Blood which was as this Day shed*; so let us be cautious never to give Consent to any such Sin, nor to any Approaches towards it.

This is the Way to get the Entail of Punishment cut off; I don't say that this will certainly do it; (for we have Instances in Scripture of the Sins of Fathers punished in their Children, even when the Children were not such Sinners as the Fathers had been) but that this is the likeliest Means we can use to do it; and that without this there can be no reasonable Expectation that it should be done.

In a word then, and to Conclude all; That the whole Nation may be re-form'd, let every one of us take Care to amend himself. And that the Government both in Church and State may be maintain'd, and our Holy Religion and the P. blick Peace preserv'd, (which, I hope, is what we do all heartily desire) Let every one of us mind his own Business, and move regularly in his own Sphere, and leave it to Kings to govern Nations, and to God to govern the World.

And when by our Afflictions we shall be brought to this Religious, Loyal, Humble, Peaceable and Contented Temper; then, and not before, we may reasonably look to see good Times; then we may pray, and reasonably hope it will be with good Success, that God will comfort us again now after the Time that he has plagued us, and for the Tears wherein we have suffered Adversity.

Which God of his Goodness grant, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom, &c.

F I N I S.

ed un-

se who
ew their
but too
ve been

o to God
efore we
ion that
we sin
hat God
as this
, nor to

that this
Fathen
sinners
it ; and
be done
y be re
Govern
gion and
y desire
his own
vern the

s, Loyal
we may
hope in
me that

Christ, a